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## ABSTRACT

This paper presents an alternative view of moral-educational leadership, one that is based on a postmodern perspective centered on concern for "others." It emphasizes the importance of including students' voices when constructing moral practices and contrasts modern approaches to those methods that build moral-ethical schools with postmodern assumptions. The article highlights the need to locate sources of morality and to recognize its pluralistic nature. It draws on data from high-school students at two prototypical urban schools to reinterpret students' experiences as a "dialogue with empirical evidence." The purpose is to highlight the moral potential for educational leadership inherent in students-as-others' points of view. For the study, 23 African-American students were interviewed. The students' responses were categorized into four empirical relationships: (1) morality as students' relationships with the "others" individually; (2) morality as students' relationships with the "others" collectively/socioculturally; (3) morality as students' strength of identities; and (4) morality as students' relationships with the "other" ideally. The postmodern stance allows the students' relationship to be portrayed as a reflection of multiple realities grounded in students' experiences in life. Students voiced the need for the adults near them to provide discipline and preparation for life after school. Contains 33 references. (RJM)

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## MORAL-ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AS EVERYDAY PRACTICE

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## MORAL-ETHICAL LEADERSHIP AS EVERYDAY PRACTICE

### Overview

In presenting an alternative view of moral educational leadership, we will argue in support of a postmodern perspective centered on the concern for "others," specifically, for the inclusion of students' voices in constructing moral practices. In the first section, we contrast modern approaches to building moral-ethical schools with postmodern assumptions. We then use data from high school students at two prototypical urban schools, "City-Wide High" and "Neighborhood High," to reinterpret students' experiences as a "dialogue with empirical evidence" (Smith, 1983; Whitt, 1984). Our purpose is to highlight the moral potential for educational leadership inherent in students-as- others' points of view.

As important as students' voices are, they have rarely been heard inside of educational leadership discourses. That may be changing over time as multiple perspectives such as feminism, critical theory (Foster, 1986) critical pragmatism (Maxcy, 1995), and post modernism-post structuralis'm (Capper, 1993, 1998) become more prominent in the field. Nevertheless, it is not difficult to reference historical antecedents on the importance of listening and acting upon students' voices/experiences. To cite two noteworthy examples, ...

When the child begins to question the wisdom of the group, its religion, its literature, its dress, its tastes, its methods of government, its standard of judgment, that moment the group should begin to take heed. It should take the child's questioning seriously. When the group fails to do this, it gives up its existence, it ceases to grow because it looks back, it worships tradition, it makes history in terms of the past rather than in terms of the future (Patri, 1917, pp. 216-217).

Then fifty years later, Larry Cuban wrote that

"Students (as early as the second grade) have strong expectations about how teachers should teach, how classrooms should be organized, and what learning is. These expectations, regardless of how conservative they are, should be accommodated to and eventually changed. Ignore them and the chances of building firm relationships with children and teaching effectively are reduced (1970, pp. 170)."

Ignore students? Indeed, as we listened to the 24 students in this study, their voices asserted more than just conservative support for the status quo; they expressed their needs for adult and societal guidance as well as their own socio-cultural prejudices. In what sense should we listen and act on students' voices? Could tomorrow's schools, even in the inner city, become worse than they currently are? That is a frightening possibility, but one that postmodern perspectives to moral educational leadership must risk in order to have any real chance of changing public schools.

The arguments in this paper are a deconstruction of the concept of moral-ethical leadership (Starratt, 1991, 1994; Sergiovanni, 1992; Noddings, 1984; Beck, 1994) as a phenomena that can be programmed by administrators and teachers. We have known empirically that "disadvantaged" students (Cuban, 1970) "deconstruct" administrator/teacher efforts through their social interactions. Yet, mainstream attempts to build "ethical" schools continue to emphasize administrator/teacher critiques of students' behaviors as the basis of moral leadership, ignoring that students' interactions are alternative attempts at

constructing "ethical" schools on different terms. Deconstruction, as a postmodern oppositional "strategy," opens up the possibilities for just/caring schools by affirming others, not ignoring them. The inclusion of student voices recognizes that morality is based on intersubjective relationships with administrators, teachers, *and students*.

Our understanding of the social practices of moral-ethical leadership is guided by a postmodern social analysis inside the context of everyday school life and lived cultural experiences. The contexts emerge inside and outside of two prototypical urban high schools, "Neighborhood High" and "City-Wide High." The former high school enrolls an ethnically and racially diverse population of students from a single lower socioeconomic neighborhood. The latter is a "magnet" school that enrolls exclusively African-American secondary students from a lower-to middle-class population. Data from 24 student interviews (Bogotch, Mirón & Murry, 1998; Mirón & Lauria, 1998) are used to support our contention that morality generally, and moral-ethical leadership particularly, is being socially constructed inside of these schools and that this construction is inherently "political," that is, meanings emerge as a result of struggle and negotiation among competing, as well as cooperating, school actors, including students, teachers, principals, and parents.

### Modern Schools and Postmodern Perspectives

Although there are subway rumblings of multiple perspectives informing the study of educational leadership, one perspective, positivism, as well as its corollary

in the social sciences (structural-functionalism), continues to resurface as the dominant paradigm. Historically and culturally the tendency has been to embrace positivism as a single metanarrative searching for the one best system.

Incorporated into the challenges of positivism in educational leadership are the languages of morality, ethics, community, and social justice. For example, Starratt (1991, 1994) opened up conversational space for a theory of practice by articulating three interrelated ethics toward the building, and designing, of an ethical school. These are: critique, justice, and caring. Yet, as worthwhile as these ethics are for making educational administration more humane (see Murry, 1995), they ultimately suffer from some of the fatal flaws of modernity. Here we will argue that modern critiques attempt at defining "ethical schools," followed by an implicit suggestion that there is a right administrative path toward designing ethical schools - - run counter to the radically contingent postmodern conditions experienced by all school participants.

Ever since T. R. Greenfield (1986), a theory of practice in educational administration/leadership has sought ways to inject values into the everyday life of public schools. Critically examining the value-laden assumptions by which school administrators determined their courses of action -- their decision-making processes -- it was believed, would lead to the potential realization in public schools of the universal moral values of justice, care, and democracy. Foster's 1986 work, Paradigms and Promises, and later Maxcy's Educational Leadership (1991) were

central both to the development of a theory of practice and to a more sophisticated understanding of the effects of power (Popkewitz, 1998). Moreover, as Apples' (culturally grounded) political-economic perspective long established in curriculum theory, critical scholarship and empirical research in educational administration situated public schools in their broader contexts of multiple social relations in the wider society. We are indebted to these intellectual ideas which now make it possible to problematize school administration/leadership as a politico-discursive activity, in much the same manner as the new sociology of education established curriculum-as politics.

The first step in this postmodern turn is to locate the *sources* of morality. Embedded in the positivistic quest is the *transmission* of moral-ethical values into the hearts, minds and souls of students, administrators, and teachers: morality as fixed, universal principles are imposed upon schools. Thus, it becomes the moral responsibility of administration to build and establish a moral-ethical school. Lost in this objectification and source of authority is the relational notion that morality is also a result of the social interactions among subjects in specific contexts.

Postmodern perspectives locate the *sources* of morality in diverse and often incommensurable positions (see, e.g., Butler, 1992, pp. 4-5) making it pluralistic. While this perspective can be characterized as relativistic, contingent, and fluid, we argue that there is no less ethical-politico *commitment* (Biesta, 1995) than when the source of morality is transmitted as a fixed and universal principle. It is precisely

postmodernism's non-totalizing gesture which creates social, oppositional, and political spaces needed to bring the marginal, the repressed and silenced [read here as inner city students of color] into view (Brooker, 1992, p. 25). Postmodernism's rejection of unities and attempts to totalize is also its commitment towards inclusion. The argument is that modern unities bring about policies and practices of exclusion, which can lead to social injustice, repression, and violence.

A postmodern democratic impetus also differs from the previous views influenced by the Age of Enlightenment. At the center of Enlightenment lies the idea of the human subject as a consciousness fully present to itself, capable of acquiring a complete and transparent knowledge of itself and its social/historical situation. By these means, it works to liberate itself towards a state of total autonomy and freedom. In contrast, postmodern democracy challenges this understanding of the subject and knowledge as existing outside of history and as a neutral representation of the outside world. Instead the subject is "inscribed" in history and "the product of a relation of power exercised over bodies, multiplicities, movements, desires, forces" (Foucault, 1980, pp. 73-74). It recognizes that the subject "comes into presence" in a specific social and historical situation (Biesta, 1998). This "constituted subject" is the very precondition of its human agency, not a negation of it (Butler, 1992, pp. 9-13). Similarly, knowledge is not a neutral representation of the world outside, rather, knowledge is constructed. The main implication of this postmodern critique of Enlightenment epistemology is the tenet *that knowledge*



*cannot be used to combat power.* As Foucault argues, "power and knowledge directly imply one another," so that "there is no power relation without the correlative constitution of a field of knowledge, nor any knowledge that does not presuppose and constitute at the same time power relations" (1979, p. 27). Power/Knowledge is a knot that cannot be unraveled.

In sum, the postmodern/deconstructive perspective on moral educational leadership has to bring the "other" of leadership, namely, the student, into closer view. Students cannot be left outside of the analysis because they already are and have been inside of schools. We agree that establishing an moral-ethical school is a worthy goal of educational leadership. However, to be just and caring is to continually address oneself to the plight and conditions of others. Thus, for the very sake of morality, it can never be totally programmed nor constructed as a normative project driven by an external critique derived from moral principles. The postmodern/deconstructive perspective urges us to focus on the voices of the students, and more radically as McLaren (1997a, b) argues to seek validation of student experiences in matters of curriculum, administration, and moral leadership. In the next sections of this article, we ground our analysis in the data of students' voices.

### Dialogue with Evidence

Our "dialogue with evidence" emphasizes (1) empirical data as starting points for actively and continuously "beginning again" (Foucault, 1992) -- rather than

searching for specific moral-ethical criteria to judge behaviors; (2) epistemological and critical spaces to [re]construct equitable intersubjectivities, rather than describe ongoing "what is," subject-object relationships; and, (3) a normative (political) commitment to actively challenge dominant and privileged voices. Thus, the social and philosophical issues surrounding moral leadership, while not reducible to empirical answers or solutions, point towards the many paths individuals take as they struggle morally with relationships and needs inside and out of schools.

In offering a postmodern dialogue of what is happening inside of inner city, public schools, our research design describes students' perceptions of "inescapable" facts pertaining to the conditions found within high schools, their neighborhoods, and society-at-large. Through student voices, we looked towards possibilities for socially reconstructing alternative futures, not only by reporting what students described conditionally and relationally as "sometimes," "if," and "supposed to be" futures, but also by questioning the future of schools as both realities and unforeseen possibilities. We will argue that alternative educational reforms can and must emerge from what today's teachers, administrators, and students know and "don't know."

We admit from the beginning to breaking a postmodern "rule" by deliberately privileging student voices. In educational leadership research, we find it rare that adults listen to students' voices or incorporate their lived experiences into reconstructing practices and policies of schools. To us, students' voices are the

"constitutive" others in institutional relationships with teachers, administrators, and other students. They offer one more "frame" to the "constitutive outside" as they reinterpret/challenge/question existing practices and constructions of schooling, exposing some of the inequities and social privileges embedded in modern schools.

We also accept that empirical findings as presented may have unintended immoral consequences. Within the social dynamics of the public schools are possibilities and contingencies which can make things worse than they already are today. Thus, we acknowledge a worldview of not predicting or guaranteeing any categorical set of answers to the question of morality in educational leadership \_ including ethical categories of critique, justice, or caring. We deny the possibility to settle educational and moral issues on categorical terms. Instead we offer an analysis of the unstable and ill-definable postmodern condition.

### Reconstructing Moral-Ethical Leadership As Student Voices

Descriptions of two local contexts of urban schooling have been socially constructed differentially to sort students' experiences of their material and economic conditions. The differences in physical settings create different social and educational consequences, although, many of the experiences cross over into both urban school settings.

The twenty-four students in this study had all passed their grade level promotion exams. This delimitation provided the authors with a justification for

discussing connections between schooling and students' futures. That is, these students are not the system's dropouts, but active participants in school and community life. We did eliminate one of the interviewees when it became clear that her English proficiency (first language was Vietnamese) was inadequate to elaborate on her monosyllabic responses. The other 23 interviewees were all African Americans. In our first dialogue, we hear how "history" matters. Although the two urban high schools enroll students from largely similar socioeconomic backgrounds (see Lauria, Mirón, & Dashner, 1994), they paint starkly different portraits of the students' present and future social realities. The educational leadership processes at City-Wide High School help students to acquire a sense of racial pride, a quality that helps preserve the school's standing as the premier public school for African Americans in the city. Morality is constructed as a commitment to school and to the students' educational futures. By contrast, educational leadership processes at Neighborhood High locates its moral authority primarily in transmitting larger societal values onto students who need to be brought into line. Students individually and collectively resist this transmission as evidenced of White hegemony reinforced by teachers [and others] stereotyping them negatively as academic failures, hoodlums, or gang members (Mirón & Lauria, 1998).

#### A Differential Diagnosis of "City-Wide" and "Neighborhood" High Schools

City High: With support from the central district administration, "City-Wide" High has a selective admissions process. Once admitted, however, students are

required to maintain only a 2.5 GPA (out of 4.0) in order to continue. You can just "feel the academic intensity in the air." "You get a lot of prestige and a lot of pushing from your teachers and the principal." "Oh you must be smart." "If you don't apply to a college, they call you in the office: 'Why haven't you applied for a college? You need to do that.'"

Being at "City-Wide" High School is a privilege, a reward to both students and teachers. "I think coming here is like a reward as far as the teachers and the administrators and stuff because they really try to help you...." (A total of 5 students from CHS).

Ironically, while students "feel safer," and "like family here," few actually choose to bring their real families into their school lives -- "What happens at my home, I think that's my business;" some even make a sharp distinction between "City-Wide" High School and their neighborhoods. "The people in your neighborhood, it's like drugs. You always have gun shots, different things around your neighborhood. You can't be too friendly, but associative with certain people of your neighborhood" (A total of 5 students from CHS).

Further distinguishing the differences between neighborhoods and schools is the mode of communication. "You got to talk differently," and "well." "Everything have to be right the way you say it or who is your English teacher and stuff like that. You know" (3 students from CHS).

These characteristics of City-Wide High and the distinctions it strives for lead

some students to openly acknowledge contradictory individual and social consequences. For one student, "it's like they buck you up - they buck you up so much. You're the best. You're the brightest till (ah) you take certain - certain attitudes with certain situations. And if you're bucked all the time you're the best and the brightest, then you won't hear what someone else have to say. It's like you're looking down on people. That's the thing that I -I don't like. You know it's good to be complimented or, you know, you did a good job but not too much where your head gets big and you don't want to hear what no one says. That's the only thing that I don't like."

The theme of "separation:" home and school; family and friends; City-Wide students and other students; and school and society played a significant part in how students constructed relationships and how power was distributed. "[W]e're not having funding on a lot of the important programs such as etiquette (ah) for those who are unfortunate and just happen to have. Why we don't have programs like that for our [meaning all African American] students?"

"Neighborhood" High School: Being minority, especially African American, is a markedly different experience at Neighborhood High. "You don't feel privilege to be here, not at all. The only privilege you feel is maybe the air conditioner. I mean, but other than that it's just like anywhere else you go and you don't feel safe as you used to, you know. Now it's just like no.... everybody is always bringing up guns or you know, you're in class and you see dogs walking around you know....

Guard dogs, you know and they come sniff you sometimes.... I don't know if that's just to scare you or what. I don't know. I mean like ever since the boy got killed back here, it's like, you know... They try to be strict, but it's ... for all the wrong reasons."

"I can't wait till I get out this school because when I get out, I'm not coming back here for nobody.... when I get out of school, my children ain't coming here,..." (2 students for NHS).

Other Neighborhood High students expressed feelings of resentment and frustration brought on by the lack of teacher/academic support: "It's just some of the things that go on at this school that I don't understand and the teachers' attitudes and stuff.... you'll ask the teachers a question and the teacher, you know - you know just make a bad comment towards you or whatever or call you out your name and stuff. And they shouldn't do that.... Like for instance, ... I can ask you, "well (umm) how do you do this certain problem?" And the teacher, "well I just went over that - went over that with you." And I be like, "well, you know, I didn't understand so that's why I am asking you." "Yall act like yall dumb", you know. They wouldn't say it like directly towards me. They'll say it out in general, but I know they really mean it towards me.... if you're a teacher and I don't understand something, you supposed to help me. And that's what you're here for." (2 students at NHS).

### Keeping Moral Relations Fluid

In line with Foucault's (1992) call to "begin again," we present four beginning

analyses of moral life inside of the above schools (see Jackson, Bootstrom & Hansen, 1993). At the outset, we have to establish that these four new moral-ethical categories are "grounded" in everyday lived experience and in particular, student voice (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). They are our attempts to fill a theoretical void by taking seriously students' voices. Again, we reiterate that listening to these dialogues may be distracting; however, we believe they help to debunk the historical divide in educational leadership between theory- practice as binary, polar opposites.

Although students could see that their school [and society] were deliberately presented to them as "prototypes," their individual reactions were not always constrained by the externally imposed physical and social constructions. In fact, to predict students' reactions based solely upon prototypical school settings is always a category mistake. For, within the "inescapable" institutional facts, we found more than a few unpredictable student responses. It is in this sense that the varied futures described here are scientifically unforeseeable.

We present four beginnings, each representing social- discursive spaces (Popkewitz, 1998) proceeding in different directions. These futures warrant our experimental concern and educational intervention -- however difficult the circumstances, however, hesitant and confused we may be. Here are four empirical, intersubjective moral relationships identified by African American urban high school students: (1) morality as students' relationships with the "Others" individually; (2) morality as students' relationships with the "Others"



collectively/socio-culturally; (3) morality as students' strength of identities; and (4) morality as student's relationships with the "Other" ideally. Our postmodern stance enables us to describe these students' relationships as a reflection of multiple realities grounded in students' experiences in life as well as a by-product of modern schooling. These moral-ethical relationships are both fixed and fluid, realized and unrealized, reactive and ideal. As polarities and the spaces in-between, students themselves raised educational and socio-cultural questions about what they experience as well as well as what they could and could not understand. The issues, if acknowledged by themselves and with others could potentially transform the persistent social reproduction of modern schools into a more postmodern imagination for public education (McLaren, 1997a). We could hear opportunities to reconstruct other futures inside of the students' social spaces.

### Students' Relationships With Others Individually

In this first moral-ethical experience, we heard students tell us of their quid pro quo responses to others individually. That is, from students' direct and immediate interactions with others, they constructed moral responses, reacting negatively and positively. For example,

"If you get a bad teacher, then you know you got to give it to them" (NHS). "If the teacher's mean, you're gonna act bad. Like Mrs. T. She do stupid stuff. That's one teacher... I'll mess with" (NHS).

Conversely,

"If I know that a teacher is willing to help me and give me a chance and you know I know she wants [me to learn], I go in there and do my work and don't

even say a word. But if I know a teacher, you know, just looking out for her own interest - "out for a paycheck" - as they say back here, then I'll just go and talk and do the work when I'm ready. This is the way you're going to act with me, then I can act the same way with you. You know if you're not going to help me and you know you're not teaching me anything, why should I be good for you where you can just sit up there and you know just wait for Friday to come and you get paid, you know it's not benefitting me" (NHS). "I guess some teachers just feel well 'I just come to work to do my job'" (CHS).

Even in the quid pro quo equations, we noticed the "if-then conditional" qualities of students' direct and immediate reactions offering opportunities for individual dialogue. What prevents teachers and schools from recognizing and acting upon these openings? Why are so many adult discussions of students' behaviors marked by labels which hide evidence of the possibilities for changing behaviors? As we continued to listen, however, we found evidence of a different kind of quid pro quo reactions, ones which did not emanate from immediate and direct social interactions with teachers and other students. In our second moral-ethical construction, the social dynamics of students were influenced socio-culturally and historically. On the surface, students' reactions arose from differences, that is, others being or acting differently. In a deeper sense, however, it was evident that school practice/discourse was neither open to nor explicit enough for students' to understand the reasons for these differences.

#### Students' Relationships With Others Collectively:

Moral-social relations were also constructed on the bases of collective judgments grounded in group membership, often reflecting differences in race,

gender, and/or language. The differences brought to the surface by socio-cultural prejudices were further reinforced inside of schools by (1) subsequent behavioral reactions [for example, name calling led to fighting], or by (2) inexplicable consequences [that is, consequences which the students could not logically explain].

We begin first at the level of **overt difference** and subsequent reactions:

"They [Vietnamese] get called Ching Chongs and [we/Blacks] make fun of their language... They curse you out in their language." "Yea, but you know like among the kids, they're always going to rib and call him a Vietnamese, and he might call you 'nigger' or 'white boy.' That's just going to happen back here. That happens everyday." "Black kids act funny towards Vietnamese kids. They make fun of their language. You when they walk by (imitates Vietnamese laughter) and stuff like that (laughs)" (2 students for NHS).

"I think that the Vietnamese and the white groups think that we're [Blacks] like (ah) hard and things and dumb. They think all we listen to is rap. They stereotype us, you know all of us are either in jail mainly the males black males. They think they wind up in jail or in a gang or something or do drugs, sell drugs on the street. Just because a black person will have money or something or dress real nice, they automatically think that they sell drugs or something. They can't come from a nice family or whatever... I mean it's like the Vietnamese is always smarter, and they never expect a black student to be smarter than a Vietnamese, you know. They always automatically think that we're dumb" (NHS).

"Sometimes I really get angry because like if any teacher wants to teach you about Martin Luther King or something like that which you know already, it's always a Caucasian teacher. And that's just like they're trying to let you know so you want be mad at them or something, you know like that. I don't like that" (CHS).

Whereas the above descriptions illustrate socio-cultural prejudices which provoked hostility, "funning," clowning, and fighting, high school students perceived that socio-cultural differences also had educational and social

consequences. Significantly, they professed not to understand the bases [i.e., evidence] of these **covert differences**.

"But if a student is taking ESL and they're in that class for what almost four or three and a half years, and then they could come up and just move into a higher spot than someone whose worked really hard for it, I think that's wrong. Because if you work... if you're in ESL and you can't and you're not... if you don't understand, how are you going to be able to do it, you know?" (NHS).

In this brief comment, an African American student asked how an ESL student who doesn't understand English can make the honor roll. Was there empirical evidence available to the students that they ignored?

"I haven't seen them, Vietnamese, get "F" or in any of my classes. I think they are a little bit smart because they come - the came from wherever. They just want to work harder, so they could succeed in America. And they impress the teachers like I was saying.... Yeah cause I always see a Vietnamese holding their books in their hand and reading or something. They just not sitting around like, you know, if we have sub or something. Like today we had a sub and all the other students, they were talking and stuff and the Vietnamese were sitting and doing their homework and studying, so you know. I notice that" (NHS).

A similar reaction emerged with respect to student relationships with teachers. That is, just as African American students did not understand how an ESL student could be "higher," they also could not understand why [many] teachers communicate [professionally] with other teachers about students. These "unexplained." "don't know" perceptions not only widened the educational gulf between students of different races and teachers, but also reduced possibilities for building mutual trust.

"There's some teachers that you can go to talk and tell them anything, and

you know, they'll relate to you and won't tell anybody. But there's some teachers don't want to hear it, and you tell them, and the next thing you know, the teacher down- next door knows. And the next teacher knows and everybody knows." "If you tell teachers, they start thinking all kinds of things" (2 students from NHS).

"Some things happen on the weekend. You do want to bring it to school and tell the teacher if you know you feel you can talk to them. And I used to feel like that, but you know, you tell the teacher something to them. And you said this is between you and me.... But then really it's not. You find out that it's not, you know...So you don't trust them. No, I don't. I don't trust anyone....They would - they would discuss it with other teachers that they're friends with, and the teacher would come ask you about it wanting to get all in your business. It get back. And if it's something bad,..." (NHS).

That some teachers try to intervene educationally in students' lives by sharing information about students with their colleagues. is viewed here as a moral transgression [i.e., violating a private relationship and trust]. The students seemed not to have any educational context which offered alternative perspectives on information sharing and/or collaborative learning. What they do have are different socio-cultural perspectives from their experiences of teachers. For example,

"... sometimes certain things you might could talk to your friend about, they won't say anything. But like you go tell a teacher or something, they might go and tell somebody and then it'll be a whole big mess. Like say you witness a crime or something, you might tell your friends, they be quiet. You tell a teacher. They call the police, and it's a whole big old mess over something you saw, but you might not have anything to do with it (CHS).

Urban High School students have a very strong sense of what is personal and private. They believe teachers violate this moral code when talking to other teachers about them. But from a student's perspective, these educational conversations do not change the material social differences between school and

neighborhood/homes. So why talk? "So at school I just like to keep to myself cause I don't want anybody in my business even though they don't be in it anyway. But I just don't want them to be in my business." "I don't talk to too many people about my home life....Because that's for me and the people at my house to know." NHS and CHS). In this moral-ethical construction, students acted on differences qua differences, without understanding or appreciating the values of others. Especially, with respect to **covert differences**, students are left on their own to "understand" the meanings of differences among different racial- ethnic groups, themselves and adult educators, and their school- lives and home-lives. The latter are often kept separate.

This gap or lack of voice in schooling is a typical by- product of the one way nature of communications. While these dynamics do not contain and "if-then" conditional quality as the first social construction of morality, the quid pro quo reactions are neither natural nor permanent. In postmodern language, students are apparently denied human agency as learning subjects. Educational interventions need to confront the perceived moral transgression [i.e., violations of private relationships and trust] by providing an educational context for sharing information and collaborative learning. Students have different socio-cultural perspectives from their experiences with other students and teachers. These differences need to become part of the educational discourse of urban schooling.

## Students' Strength of Identity

Although a sense of identity can be distinguished in both of the above moral discourses, the notion of strength, that is, the ability to participate actively and equitably in the construction of identity, is another moral-ethical category. In empirical terms, some high school students reversed quid pro quo reactions. Instead of 'like begets like,' students with a particular strength of identity could "begin again" by acting out of their own sense of self.

Interviewer Question: Suppose you didn't like a teacher's attitude, how do you think you would act differently or have you acted differently in that kind of class?

"Well then I prove myself even more so, so she can't say you failed because of this. I say, 'well, look I do all my work. I make straight 'As'. I make straight 'Bs' or straight 'Cs'. I passed this class, now I think I showed you that I can do my best" (CHS).

"Some teachers don't like the students. Umm, some classes have over 40 students, and some of the teachers don't want to teach in that class. Umm, and quite a few students that are discouraged because what the teachers say about them. Some teachers may call them dumb, so you know ...The students just take it like that. Then they just don't put in any effort into proving the teacher wrong or anything. Well, for me, I haven't had any problems with teachers. If they had a problem with me, I'd proved them wrong" (NHS).

Some students expressed personal satisfaction from hard work and grades.

"When I get grades, it makes me feel good. It makes me feel like I've done something. I'm just not another student here getting a grade like I like to be recognized for what I do cause I think I've come a long way" (NHS).

"Sometimes, I stress myself out trying to get those good grades. But (umm).... and it's worth it.... because I feel that in order for tomorrow to be better, I have to do good today.... If I make good grades, then I can get into college and I can do what I want to do" (CHS).

As with the other moral relations, there are social and educational consequences. The necessity of proving oneself reflects a particular set of moral values, which has its own social consequences. In the prototypical social constructions, it was evident that the cultures inside of "City" and "Neighborhood" High Schools were deliberately, that is historically, designed as different and as transitioning students **away** from their neighborhoods, homes, and a sense of community. For some African American students, this gesture offers hope of a more affluent and peaceful life. It is the way the different school leadership coped with the chaos of postmodernity, its endless moral complexity in the midst of its quest for social control, self-regulation and school governance. "Well at this point in time, society just wants peace of mind, tranquility, and that's the only thing. They want to see hard workers in a society that can be productive" (CHS). "[Y]ou know, you have to have proper etiquette you know to fit in and it depends on what... You want to have some manners wherever you're going" (CHS).

The values in students' strength of identity, that is, in proving teachers wrong, in not getting caught up in the rowdy, non-educational behaviors of their peers/schools, and the feeling of pride in getting good grades -- all of these "successful" students begin to lose their connections not only with the past, but also with others around them. The values of individual achievement may displace other needs for trust or community. These students come to see the future as being



left up to them. It not only makes for a lonely present in school relationships, but also for disconnected futures. Yet, schools/teachers/administrators say "yes" to building identity strength, but, we should ask here, at what cost to these students and to the future of our society? Focusing on individual, ahistorical values makes it less likely that students will reinvest, return, or rebuild urban communities -- as an alternative future.

### Students' Relationships with Others Ideally

In this moral relationship, students' potential reconstruction of morality moves away from direct and immediate experiences, collective social prejudices, as well as racial- ethnic identity toward a picture of what school is supposed to be as well as what teachers and principals qua educators should do. By listening to students' constructions of ideal moral relationships, we can also hear their sense of [in]justices and their pleas for adult educational interventions -- especially their desires for caring.

Students voiced the need for the adults near them to provide discipline and a preparation for life in the outside world:

"I mean I feel like they only care about they self because if they cared about the students, they wouldn't put up with half the stuff that they do with them. They would let them know, you know they have a big world out there. You have to do what you have to do. And you know if it takes for them to sit down and talk to the students and tell them how hard it is, well let them do that, you know. I don't know. I guess they only look out for they self." "[J]ust let the child know that they care and that's not all what they here for. Well, basically that's what they're here for, but just let the child know if you need somebody talk to, I'm here. You know some teachers are really cold. They'll be like "I don't care", you know. I don't know. They just real cold, and I

think you know just be open with the students. Teach them - treat them as though they're your child. ... I think they should just do what they can and don't give up so easy" (NHS).

High school students also see the need for curricular changes to connect with the outside world so that they can understand it better:

"[A]ll your classes should be learning about what's going on now.... How things are handled.... A lot of students would learn much more.... like when you watch the news, ... you don't know what's going on, and you don't even understand it, so you wind up flipping the channel to a cartoon...."I'll watch the Cosby Show if I don't understand it, but you know, maybe if the teacher explain that to me and say 'well, hey the whole class watch the news tonight and we'll discuss it tomorrow,' maybe then I'll understand, you know. I think the school should teach us the students more about the everyday life instead of always on Rosa Park and this and kind of..." (NHS).

Students plaintively asked for more educational caring from both teachers and principals:

"[T]hey [teachers] need to be more caring I think. You might have one or two people that care about us.... Some of them, you know if you fail, you fail. They would pull you on the side and say, 'Well, you're failing, and I think you have more potential than that. If you need help...' you know something like that" (NHS).

Students' humanistic critique extends beyond caring in schools. They say: "I don't live in the best neighborhood ... that are important to society. I don't think, you know, society really cares about me" (CHS); As quoted earlier, "Why we're not having funding on a lot of the important programs, such as etiquette for those who are unfortunate... why we don't have programs like that for our students?" (CHS).

Students demand more discipline, more caring, and a more relevant

curriculum. Many adults inside and out of schools agree. Some high school students, however, wonder out loud how today's teachers and administrators can possibly help them? "[The adults] they're ignorant on the subject so therefore how can you teach somebody something you don't know?" (CHS). This includes knowledge of neighborhoods and the needs of students.

Our purpose was not only to make evident the hold that modern school has upon students, but to suggest that ideals -- as grounded, lived experiences -- go beyond the school and classroom walls/practices into socio-cultural issues. The educational question this raises, however, highlights the lack of social and political knowledge teachers have about injustice, material conditions of students and alternative futures. In this regard, we argue that teachers and administrators (as well as society) have no choice but to follow/include students in their notions of educational leadership.

### Conclusion of Dialogue with Evidence

Although we are acutely mindful of the glaring absence of the voices of these students' teachers and administrators, our intention is not to silence these voices. Instead, student voices have been privileged in the spirit of deconstruction on the need to be mindful, just, and caring for the other. As Derrida (1984) cautions us, ethics is impossible to achieve without this relentless attention to the needs and situatedness of the other. We privileged students' voices to better see their lived

experiences inside of schools -- not to judge or label students [an unintentional consequence of describing fixed moral categories], but rather to begin again the moral-ethical discourses which can be co-constructed more equitably among teachers, administrators and students.

What we presented here is only a first step, that is, the listening to student voices. But it is not enough to just listen. This dialogue with evidence indicated that students constructed moral relationships from everyday social interactions -- as immediate and direct experiences, as socio-cultural prejudices, as identities, and as ideals. While these relationships are empirically evident [i.e., can be heard] **inside** of schools, their status as moralities are/would be denied, either as starting points for reform discourse or as pragmatic moral consequences of modern school/communities. What we do with this empirical evidence is a matter of political philosophy. The evidence itself is neither moral nor immoral, to be used for reform or not. How we see it -- as ignorance, social consequences, stereotypical attitudes, or the bases for dialogue -- is, at heart, a philosophical issue of interpretation. One decides a priori whether to weave these voices/discourses into educational reforms of structures, relationships, teaching and learning. Our argument rests on seeing students as participants, intersubjects, not as other peoples' children.

By ignoring/denying the moralities of students, educators miss opportunities to reconstruct schools in ways that would bring students **inside** educational

relationships. Thus, the social spaces within the modern school repeatedly struggles with trying to educate students who have been left outside of the social construction of schools. Perhaps that is the response to teachers ongoing complaints that they can't really teach. Given that at least half of what is needed to teach has been historically and socially left out of the educational process, why should we expect to find solutions to urban public school problems?

As to the practice of educational leadership, especially the discourse of moral-ethical leadership, the administrator and teacher-leader can never be the final source of morality, nor its arbiters in public schools. This binary perspective needs to be reconfigured by entering into an intersubjective relationship where what one wants to achieve professionally and morally through leadership can be modified -- even transformed -- by the student and the broader school community. Put more abstractly, morality can only come from those in-between spaces created by the interaction of administrators and teacher-leaders, and students.

#### From Social to Critical/Oppositional to Politically Moral Spaces

Inside of modern schools are opportunities for new dialogues. Just by listening to students' voices, we have seen how important relationships are, especially between students and teachers. Although reciprocal and dependent, these in-school relationships were not always educational or moral.

A pervasive aspect of modern schools is that both students and teachers act to keep both micropolitical and socio-cultural dynamics outside of the school building.

These boundaries are mutually constructed. When students see teachers talking to other teachers, they don't know about professional cooperation and adult concern, rather they "see" violations of privacy. When students see Vietnamese students' names on the honor roll list, they don't know about work habits, test scores, and homework grades, rather they "see" favoritism and discrimination. How come teachers don't "see" what students "see" and don't know? How come teachers don't act relationally and educationally to inform them? Is it because teachers themselves also don't know what students don't know? There is nothing radical about suggestions and efforts to bring in socio-cultural issues into curricula (Levin & Riffel, 1999). So why does it not happen? In some instances, the answer is obvious, at least to some students: "They're ignorant on the subject so therefore you can teach somebody something you don't know." (CHS).

How well are today's schools teaching children to respond to cultural, economic, technological, and demographic changes? Who is teaching children to ask critical and social questions, how to view images, brands, fashions, and how to weigh the evidence and consequences for their actions?

Yet, even as we acknowledge gaps in understanding labor market issues, street life, poverty, and housing, when we examined the dialogues with evidence we found numerous other examples of "don't know" issues which are grounded in relationships. In this context, the differences between City-Wide and Neighborhood High Schools were striking. Inside of "City- Wide" High, we found only four "don't

know" situations: two examples pointed to what teachers don't know; the other two examples, however, were not about the students themselves, but about their conceptions of others: that is, why friends might drag one another down, and why Black girls might want to be like the character in Toni Morrison's The Bluest Eyes.

In contrast, at "Neighborhood" High, we identified seventeen "don't know" issues: five regarding race relations; four regarding why teachers don't take more time to talk with students (i.e., caring); and, eight as ... well let's listen again:

- . Don't know: how to study, i.e., "I just listen to the teacher. If I catch it, I catch it;"
- . Don't know: why teachers talk to other teachers;
- . Don't know: why the school brings in guard dogs to sniff students;
- . Don't know: the outside world as incomprehensible, e.g., not just watching the News, but also watching Cosby;
- . Don't know: why someone would pick a member of their family as a role model;
- . Don't know: how to make decisions; and
- . Don't know: about the other people (including students who make the honor roll) at their school.

None of these questions, issues or situations can be answered without establishing different social interactions among administrators, teachers, and students. At the same time, none of these issues are prohibited topics or "outside"

the capacities of adults. Why then are they missing, especially at the Neighborhood High School? To us, these questions, issues, and situation sound like children asking adults questions and expecting the adults to offer comprehensible explanations.

If this lack of discourse is not about having answers, perhaps the issue is time. Does answering any one or set of the above questions prevent students from learning algebra? If the teacher talks about these issues in math class, might there not be time to teach algebra? In the four year timeframe that high school students attend a single school location, is there time to correct the mislabeling of racial and national groups? Is there time to address gender inequities? Is there time to question the humaneness of "clowning"? Is there time to talk and learn collaboratively?

Are there other reasons why these dialogues stay outside the class/school doors? For over a century, American Schools have separated students' questions and needs from teaching, learning/curriculum. It is a separation of knowledge and power, with the naive hope that by transmitting school knowledge, whether in K-12 classrooms or teacher education programs, it would lead [hence leadership] to educational reforms/social improvement. But, critical researchers have pointed out that the knowledge is based on unequal power relationships and that knowledge is never neutral. Thus, inside the differential prototypes, with their unexamined differences, the attempts to inject moral criteria into schools paradoxically contributes to greater social injustices. In opposition, we have argued that moral



criteria in modern society and modern schools need to be socially reconstructed through full participation with a concern for the "other." The role of moral leadership in everyday practice and research is to identify the opportunities for moral discourses, and then act politically. The postmodern knowledge/power knot calls for more, not less politics in schools. Moral leadership seeks to promote students' fluid relationships with others individually and collectively, as well as strengthening identities, all as everyday "ideal" practices.

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<sup>1</sup> The version of this paper presented at AERA, Montreal emphasizes the empirical analysis of students' voices. In other drafts, the authors shift the focus towards theoretical discussions of deconstruction and political morality. If interested in seeing these other versions, please contact Dr. Louis Miron, [lfmiron@uci.edu](mailto:lfmiron@uci.edu).

<sup>2</sup> There is considerable debate as to the differences among deconstruction (Derrida, 1982, 1984), postmodernism (Lyotard, 1984), and poststructuralism (Foucault, 1979, 1992). We are willing, however, to accept readers' criticisms for not bringing out these differences in this paper.



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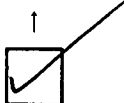
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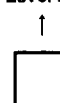
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